

Office: 246 S. Higuera St.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
Mail: PO Box 1014
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406



Phone: (805) 544-1777
Email: info@ecoslo.org
Online: www.ecoslo.org

Protecting and enhancing the Central Coast since 1971

March 24, 2016

Mr. David Albright
U.S. EPA, Region 9
Manager, Drinking Water Protection Section (WTR-9)
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

RE: Arroyo Grande Oil Field (AGOF), San Luis Obispo County, California, US EPA Region 9

Dear Mr. Albright:

The Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo (ECOSLO) would like to urge your denial of the proposed aquifer exemption from the California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources ("DOGGR"), which would allow for an increased number of Class II injection wells in the Arroyo Grande oil field ("AGOF"). This proposal is not valid until approved by the EPA – please deny this project.

First and foremost, DOGGR permitted up to 5,625 potentially unlawful Class II injection wells to inject chemicals, wastewater and other pollutants into aquifers without exemptions. These include 90 wells at the AGOF: 14 waste disposal wells and 76 enhanced oil recovery wells that primarily inject steam underground, sometimes at high volumes. In light of this information, it is your duty to deny any further aquifer exemptions until California's DOGGR only operates within its permits and legal boundaries. Any approval of abusive, unregulated projects would tarnish what the EPA stands for and will contaminate our dwindling water resources.

Secondly, California's historic drought requires the State's residents, business, and institutions to reconsider how we handle our water resources – both on the surface and beneath it. While some of the aquifers beneath Price Canyon (AGOF) may be rich in hydrocarbons Freeport McMoRan already operates outside of these approved boundaries, effectively damaging the groundwater resources that surround the oil field. How can the public be expected to trust the operations of a company and industry that already operate outside of the law? The primary purpose of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) is to protect any water sources – both current and potential. The SDWA does not attempt to balance the integrity of drinking water sources with industrial pursuits. On the contrary, as the court found in *United States v. King* (1974), "the most effective way to ensure clean drinking water was to prevent pollution of underground aquifers in the first place, rather than to clean up polluted aquifers after the fact."

Thirdly, the applicant fails to address any potential impacts of earthquakes, no matter how small. It

has been proven that pumping of underground water resources results in subsidence and this subsidence can cause earthquakes. For a company that is in charge of pumping groundwater, it seems obscene that they would fail to employ hydrogeological models, or even mention, the seismicity on this aquifer.

In conclusion, ECOSLO would like to urge your denial of the aquifer exemption expansion in the Arroyo Grande Oil Field for three reasons. First, (1) because of the unlawful and irresponsible permitting practices on the part of the DOGGR; (2) the historic drought, which is compounded by misuse of our water resources; and (3) the failure of the applicant to prove that its practices are as safe as they claim.

Sincerely,



Mary A. Ciesinski
ECOSLO Executive Director

CC: Michele Dermer
US EPA Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94015

George Robin
US EPA Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94015

Bruce Kobelski
Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water
USEPA Headquarters
William Jefferson Clinton Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Mail code: 4606M
Washington, DC 20460